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AUTHOR Heredia, Armando; Francis, Norbert
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ABSTRACT

Although traditional indigenous stories are widely recognized for their artistic merits and their role in the linguistic and cultural continuity of indigenous peoples, they are seldom used in schools. This paper discusses the instructional uses of traditional coyote stories, with particular reference to bilingual revitalization programs involving the teaching of indigenous languages. Instructional uses fall into two broad areas of school-based language learning: the development of academic discourse proficiencies and the development of second-language proficiency (using original versions for indigenous language revitalization purposes and translations for students dominant in the indigenous language and learning the national language). Coyote stories vary widely in their structural complexity and themes. In this variability lies their power as a genre, from a pedagogical point of view. Two extended examples illustrate the features that, respectively, lend themselves to the two broad language learning objectives: developing textual consciousness and literacy-related discourse competencies and providing a source of second-language comprehensible input. The two stories are the Nez Perce "Coyote and the Shadow People," which has a complex story line similar to the Orpheus myth, and from central Mexico, "The Opossum and the Coyote," a simpler children's tale with repetitive structure. Contains 17 references. (Author/SV)

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Teaching Indigenous Languages

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Legends, myths, folk tales, and stories have long been an important aspect of the history and culture of indigenous people; vehicles to preserve, carry, and teach historical events, religious beliefs, ethics, and values to the young and old. Ethnographers and students of folklore have described in detail and extensively analyzed the literary aspects of oral tradition. However, despite the broad consensus on the artistic merits of traditional stories and the role they have played in the linguistic and cultural continuity of indigenous peoples, they are little used in schools. This paper discusses the instructional uses of traditional stories is meant to serve as a contribution to realizing their educational potential.

Story telling was a way of relating history, transmitting cultural knowledge, and giving expression to the esthetic and poetic endeavors of all Native American peoples. As Chief Standing Bear explained:

> Story-telling is an ancient profession, and these stories are among our oldest possessions. For many years before the white man ever came to our homeland these legends were told over and over, and handed down from generation to generation. They were our books, our literature, and the memories of the storytellers were the leaves upon which they were written. (quoted in Humishuma, 1990, p. 305)

Erdoes and Ortiz (1984) refer to the 166 legends that they recorded as productions from the heart and soul of the Native people of North America:

> Some have been told for thousands of years, and they are still being told and retold, reshaped and refitted to meet their audience's changing needs, even created anew out of a contemporary man's or woman's vision. (p. xi)

While authorship and possession were typically collective, as with all esthetic and formal language use, special conditions and contexts of performance, the narrator's qualifications, and even, in some circumstances, strict requirements of execution and replication were observed. For example, Plains Indians followed prescribed procedures specifically identifying persons for conserving and sharing stories, who "owned" and protected individual story bundles. When the time was right, transfer of the story bundles would be carefully transacted by a process that involved formal instruction and preparation (Lankford, 1987).

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Clearly, oral esthetic, ceremonial, and formal genres depart from the context-embedded registers of everyday casual conversation in a similar way that their written counterparts differ from situation-dependent graphic messages.

Oral tradition and writing

It is important to note that the indigenous cultures of the Americas were not complete strangers to complex systems of graphic representation when the Europeans introduced alphabetic writing in the 16th Century. The Maya were evidently the most advanced in this area, with the Aztecs not far behind with their hybrid system that clearly was evolving toward true writing (the representation of *units of language* in graphic form). Montemayor (1993) compares the two systems:

> Mayan writing, the closest to what we would define as a [true] writing system, and Náhuatl, had at their disposal numerals, logograms, phonetic and semantic determiners, and rebus elements. They were able to transcribe homonyms, or rather homophonic suffixes and endings. These pictographs and symbols not only represented ideas, but also sounds and sound patterns, which presupposes the capacity not only to recognize parts of words, but also the ability to recognize homophonic relationships among these parts and among other words. Writing was employed by priests, nobles and specialized scribes, and its origin and functions were closely tied to religion. (p. 22)

At the time of the European contact, many of the tribes to the North had already experimented with various pictographic, iconic, and mnemonic systems. Lankford notes:

> Europeans had early commented on the wampum (bead) belts used by speakers at formal councils to remind themselves of the historical or mythical episodes they were to tell; in the Plains the same devices were used, but they seem to have been more usually painted on skin. Both practices seem to have existed in the Southeast. (1987, p. 47)

However, a full account of pre-Columbian writing will never be available because of the massive destruction of bibliographical and archival data during the Conquest. While the greater part of the material was surely lost, significant portions of the historical record and much of the poetic and narrative tradition was preserved orally.

The interest in indigenous narratives and poetry actually dates to the period immediately following the Conquest as missionaries and religious scholars began to take stock of the devastating loss to scientific and cultural knowledge that had already been irrevocably consummated. The compilation, transcription, and publication of indigenous oral tradition has continued to this day. More recently with the resurgence of interest in preserving the Native languages

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of the Americans, original editions have begun to be prepared, in many cases, without translation.

Critics of oral tradition transcription have pointed to the vastly differing contexts of oral performance on the one hand and the conventions of written language on the other—the collective and interactive processes that mediate text construction between narrator and audience versus the isolated and decontextualized encoding of the writer. However, despite the modifications that transcription entails (adjusting, for example, for the absence of an immediate and physically present audience and the loss of certain discourse resources available only to the narrator—prosody, deixis, and so forth), both historical evidence and our own experience in compilation and transcription have demonstrated, we believe, that the alleged discontinuities have been entirely overstated. In any case, transcribed and edited versions of oral narrative are not meant to capture the singularly interactive features of face-to-face performance. On the one hand, the formal and artistic genres of traditional cultures approximate in significant ways the planned, and peculiarly structured discourse that characterizes most (but, again, not all) written expression. And on the other hand, edited versions, in print (which need not in any fundamental way imply the displacement of oral forms) offer the reader/listener new options that we will briefly explore in the following sections.

Narrative structure of the stories

The very selective survey of coyote stories presented below highlights the vast classroom potential of this branch of oral tradition. Even a very introductory study and analysis of their literary aspects by teachers would enrich any reading and language arts program. But in particular, incorporating this awareness into teaching practice would be an essential component of bilingual language revitalization programs involving the teaching of indigenous languages. From our own rather summary examination of the material, teaching applications would seem to fall into two broad areas of school-based language learning:

1. the development of academic discourse proficiencies—the narrative being an "early form" in terms of its acquisition in young children. Teaching language and reading comprehension skills through sustained exposure and direct instruction is ideally realized in both the indigenous language (original versions) and the national language, separately, and in the respective instructional contexts and classroom domains.[1]

[1]For many indigenous students, their first language has become the language of wider communication, the national language (Spanish, English, and so forth). In other cases, fewer and fewer in recent years, the indigenous language remains the students' first language.

2. the development of second language proficiency; in the original versions for indigenous language revitalization purposes and in translation for learning the national language by indigenous language dominant students.

In our first example, the Colville-Okanogan story "Coyote and the Buffalo," scarcity of natural resources and their judicious exploitation is its theme. The reader/listener must infer from the character's actions which forces and tendencies they represent. Predictable conflicts and rivalries foreshadow the unstable resolution (Humishuma, 1990). The White Mountain Apache "Coyote Gets Rich off the White Men" (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984) resembles a roller coaster ride of crises and partial resolutions. One problem is solved only to be met with its sequel, each leaving one with the question: "Have I been down this road before?" The series of unresolved conflicts maintains the required narrative tension typical of the coyote genre. From the literacy teaching point of view, forcing the reader/listener to reflect on the constant play of words and metaphors, insinuation, half-truth, and outright deceit introduces an important metalinguistic activity—differentiating between what characters say and mean (Torrence & Olson, 1987).

Closely related to the say/mean distinction is the portrayal of Coyote's complex and ambiguous character. A literary feature usually associated with modern fiction, especially the novel, is ambivalence and inner strife, a common state of mind for our canine hero. Research on literacy development has pointed to the reader/listener's focus on and contemplation of characters' inner psychological states, thoughts, and feelings as an important milestone toward decontextualized comprehension strategies (Torrence & Olson, 1985). In "The Story of the Rabbit and his Uncle Coyote," a Tzutuhuil story (Sexton, 1992), and "Coyote's Rabbit Chase," Tewa (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984), the use of dramatic irony presents but another opportunity for the emergent reader to reconcile contradictions and disparities of all sorts.

Heroism is unambiguously conferred upon our protagonist in the Diné version of "Coyote Brings Fire" (Newcomb & Zolbrod, 1993). The sequence of building conflicts and increasing tension, punctuated by the characteristic rhythm and tempo of the omnipresent parallel structures and recurring patterns, culminates in Coyote's escape from the Fire Man. Throughout this and many other coyote stories, the extensive recourse to metaphoric language ("cloud of sparks," "in the air waiting for a flame to blaze upward," "showers of sparks"), again, calls the reader/listener's attention to linguistic forms, the poetic functions in general, and how words are good for more than just expressing referential meaning. Especially regarding the higher literacy proficiencies, the reader must be able to reflect on what words actually (i.e., that which is stipulated by the text itself) mean as opposed to the mere interpretation of what was intended, as in casual conversation (see Olson & Hildyard, 1983).

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Two contrasting examples

Coyote stories vary widely in their structural complexity, as well as thematically. In this variability, precisely, lies their power as a genre, from the pedagogical point of view. We would like to call the reader's attention to two particularly illustrative examples, each exemplifying features that, respectively, lend themselves to our two broad language learning objectives: 1) the development of textual consciousness and literacy-related discourse competencies, and 2) a source of second language comprehensible input.

Coyote and the Shadow People—for discourse competence

While the theme of the journey to the Land of the Dead in order to retrieve a loved one is apparently universal among indigenous peoples, in "Coyote and the Shadow People" coyote rises to truly heroic and humanlike proportions.[1] The Death Spirit/Guide offers Coyote (who we find in the opening episode weeping and lonely) the opportunity to be reunited with his wife. To our tragic figure, he must repeat the classical admonition too many times: "You must do whatever I say, do not disobey" (Ramsey, 1983).

Guided through a series of images and illusions that Coyote (at first confused) must acknowledge as real, he is rewarded with the arrival at the longhouse where he greets old friends. Upon being reunited with his wife and admonished one last time not to touch her, he sets out on the return journey; the descent from the fifth mountain signaling the triumph over the Underworld. However, by the fourth encampment, the wife's apparition had become too attractive for Coyote to resist touching. Weeping at her loss, he vainly retraces his journey, reenacting the illusions of the first trip that are now so movingly useless, finally he arrives back at the dusty prairie where he first encountered the Lodge of the Shadows.

Here, the teacher can take full advantage of the complex interplay between irony and foreshadowing. As Ramsey points out, "in a sense, everything Coyote does in his quest foreshadows his failure, both for himself and his wife, and for the great precedent of returning from death that he might establish. Specific prefigurements occur at every turn" (1983, p. 53). This element of textual coherence cannot be underestimated, and unfortunately in many elementary reading and language arts programs developing the ability to mentally construct it

[1]The presentation and percipient literary criticism of this Nez Perce Orphic story we owe to J. Ramsey (1983), whose analysis we follow closely. The myth of Orpheus and Euridice is surely one of the most prominent examples of the universality of traditional narrative themes. The recording, transcription, and translation of "Coyote and the Shadow people" forms part of the extensive ethnographic and literary work of A. Phinney of Columbia University and a member of the Nez-Perce tribe. Swadesh (1966) shares with us a Nutca version where "Orpheus" travels by canoe and is counseled and guided by an elderly woman from his tribe who he finds on a strange and unknown beach.

is left for the student to somehow spontaneously acquire. This particular comprehension skill becomes increasingly more useful as children's reading material becomes more difficult. Students in the upper grades will find school texts more abstract and less transparent because predicting strategies based almost exclusively on general previous knowledge lose their universal applicability. The reader must rely to a greater extent on his or her ability to find *in the text itself* the cues, referents, causal relationships, and antecedents necessary for constructing global meaning.

Predicting strategies in reading have long been recognized as fundamental to both decoding and comprehension (Smith, 1988). Expectation and anticipation facilitate the processing of text at all levels. Perhaps at some levels, direct teaching of the patterns may require relatively limited conscious attention on the part of the teacher (e.g., sound patterns and grammar structures). However, at the higher levels, deliberate and systematic instruction plays a critical role in the acquisition of the advanced text processing skills that are the mainstay of textbook-type academic discourse.

In "Coyote and the Shadow People" some of the cues are explicit. After lecturing the traveler extensively against his inclination to do foolish things and repeating: "you must never, never touch her...but never touch her," in an aside, the Spirit says to himself "I hope that he will do everything right." Other cues are more subtle. Upon arriving at the Lodge of the Shadows, Coyote suddenly, and in apparent contradiction to his desire to take his wife back home, tells the Spirit that he wants to stay with his friends.

Coyote's futile recapitulation of the failed first journey (pretending to see the wild horses on the prairie, going through the motions of picking and eating the berries, and raising the door flap to the lodge) calls for special attention by the teacher, even perhaps during reading, in mid-discourse. On the unconscious level the young reader/listener *experiences the effect* of the different layers of parallelism and symmetry in the narration. Contrast is artfully reiterated: day and night, living world and shadow world, suffering (the heat and dust of the day) and celebration (the lodge reunion). The repetition of detail evokes the *images* that bring narrator and listener closer, another of the many features that everyday conversation and literature share (Tannen, 1989).

But it is when students begin to consciously reflect upon these structural aspects of the text that they are beginning to acquire the basic competencies of what Cummins and Swain (1987) call Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). In addition to the thematic and general *content schemata*, the students' network of previous knowledge will now call upon the powerful text organizing tools that correspond to their newly acquired system of *formal schemata* (Carrell, 1989; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). The skillful teacher can guide their students in discovering, for themselves, these literary features and discourse patterns.

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Tlacual uan coyotl—for second language learning

Our second example comes from the oral tradition of the Náhuatl speaking communities of Central Mexico, where we were able to record a complete version of "Tlacual uan Coyotl" (The Opossum and the Coyote) from a middle-aged informant, native of San Isidro Buensuceso, Tlaxcala. Both thematically and structurally, the narrative falls at the opposite end of the continuum from the Nez Perce Orphic myth, although the particular context of the performance, an audience of young children, surely contributed to its simplification. But here, it is this characteristic that corresponds to the instructional objective in question: second language acquisition.

Along the lines of another common theme, especially in Mexico (see "Didxaguca' sti' lexu ne gueu," a Zapoteco version that attempts to account for a different natural phenomenon, de la Cruz & de la Cruz, 1990), Coyote arrives at what he thinks is an agreement with God to eat all His children. God's confederate, the opossum, submits the (in this case, outrageously) foolish coyote to a series of outlandish deceptions and deservingly punishing pranks. If the young listeners do not begin to predict the outcome of the subsequent sequences from the opening frame where the lowly coyote thinks he has actually made a contract with God, they may take note of opossum's patent lie in episode #2 that Coyote wholeheartedly believes. Opossum assures Coyote that, "God won't see [him]" drink the pulque (the agreement was for Coyote to fast before he could eat all the Earth's creatures). Seven episodes of opossum's craftiness and evasion at coyote's expense end with the latter hungry and alone, waiting forever for opossum to reemerge from his burrow.

What "Tlacual uan Coyotl" may lack in universality of theme or structural sophistication is more than compensated for in the series of repetitive structures in close succession, with the pertinent referents in high-profile foreground. This is the ideal kind of sequence for second language learners. Each short episode begins with the same initial event: Coyote comes looking, running after, wandering and (later) faltering; the repeated promise to devour Opossum who, each time, shifts the responsibility of the deception to the pulque opossum, the shepherd opossum, the turkey opossum, and so forth, nicely recapitulating for the reader/listener the sequence of deceptions. True to the repetitive pattern, Coyote, pleadingly, demands to know, *every time* why Opossum is deceiving him so much. And every time he reminds himself of God's admonishment.

The *over*-repetition of key content words (Toteotatzin—Our God Father, niccuaz—eat up, amo nimitztelhuiz—I won't accuse you, otnechacacaya—you deceived me), signaled by the appropriate intonation markers, increases the comprehensible input level. This feature makes the narrative even more accessible to the second language learner, in this case the Spanish speaking student whose Náhuatl language skills are still incipient or have suffered a degree of erosion.

The singular merit, from the pedagogical standpoint, of the Náhuatl coyote story and many others like it consists of the combination of simplified structure

and authenticity. Too often authentic texts lack the necessary modifications that second language students depend on to be able to process textual material in their weaker language. In fact, with appropriate visual context support (puppets of Opossum and Coyote and props that depict the seven action sequences) the performance of "Tlacual uan coyotl" could serve as a highly effective language and literacy instructional material for level one (or even level zero) beginners in Náhuatl. Here, the process of meaning construction is supported by the key content word items, the limited concept load, repetitive action sequences, and the application of general previous knowledge.

For language revitalization purposes this type of narrative genre is a critical component of academic language input that, in turn, represents the raw material for learning new vocabulary and acquiring or reinforcing the grammatical structures of the indigenous language. Its complete and authentic characteristics facilitate learning the structural aspects of the language. Furthermore, learning language in context not only contributes to the development of higher order comprehension skills but integrates the all important cultural component (more critical in situations of indigenous language loss) into the language arts curriculum. Geographical features and towns mentioned in the narrative are often concrete cultural referents that are tied to important historical moments and turning points. The introduction of certain characters often correspond to historically significant transitions in the domain of interethnic contact: the white man, the priest, and new non-indigenous institutions.

For the monolingual indigenous language speaker, or beginner, translations into Spanish or English of oral tradition material provide for many of the same advantages outlined above. Reading and listening to the traditional stories of one's community insure significant levels of top-down support for the difficult second language decoding and processing tasks. And of course, the straight forward temporal/sequential narrative schema (with elements of causal/logical organization) lends itself well for native level Náhuatl speaking children in their initial stages of literacy development.

Conclusion

The popularity of indigenous oral tradition in translation, especially in regions of sustained intercultural contact, attests to the broad applicability of the various sub-genres (creation legends rivaling the coyote stories in both English and Spanish editions) for expanding non-indigenous students "narrative awareness" beyond the familiar patterns of their own traditional texts. The potential of this indigenous literary form for enriching the reading and language arts curriculum has been realized only partially, even in the most favorable contexts of additive/developmental bilingual education. Our examination of the multitude of applications has focused on only a few examples in the area of reading. Without a doubt, applying the material to the area of developing students' writing skills would be equally as productive. Coyote stories are basically vignettes in a never-ending story, prototypes of inexhaustible variations and permutations. It is, in fact, the assimilation of a relatively limited set of text organiza-

tion schemata, mastery of basic narrative techniques, and a set of formulas that the traditional story teller has relied on in developing the extensive repertoires of his or her art.

In closing, it is important to emphasize that creativity depends on the writer's access to structures and patterns, the application of which are facilitated by high degrees of metacognitive awareness—fundamentally, on an awareness of how expression is *constrained*. These text construction frameworks and organizers are consolidated by significant amounts of exposure to the pertinent models and reflective and deliberate examination of how they work (which includes reflection upon and feedback on one's own productions). Creativity, is also expansive and divergent, and within the self-imposed limits of all good literature, Coyote can do, or at least try, anything.

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